RURAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

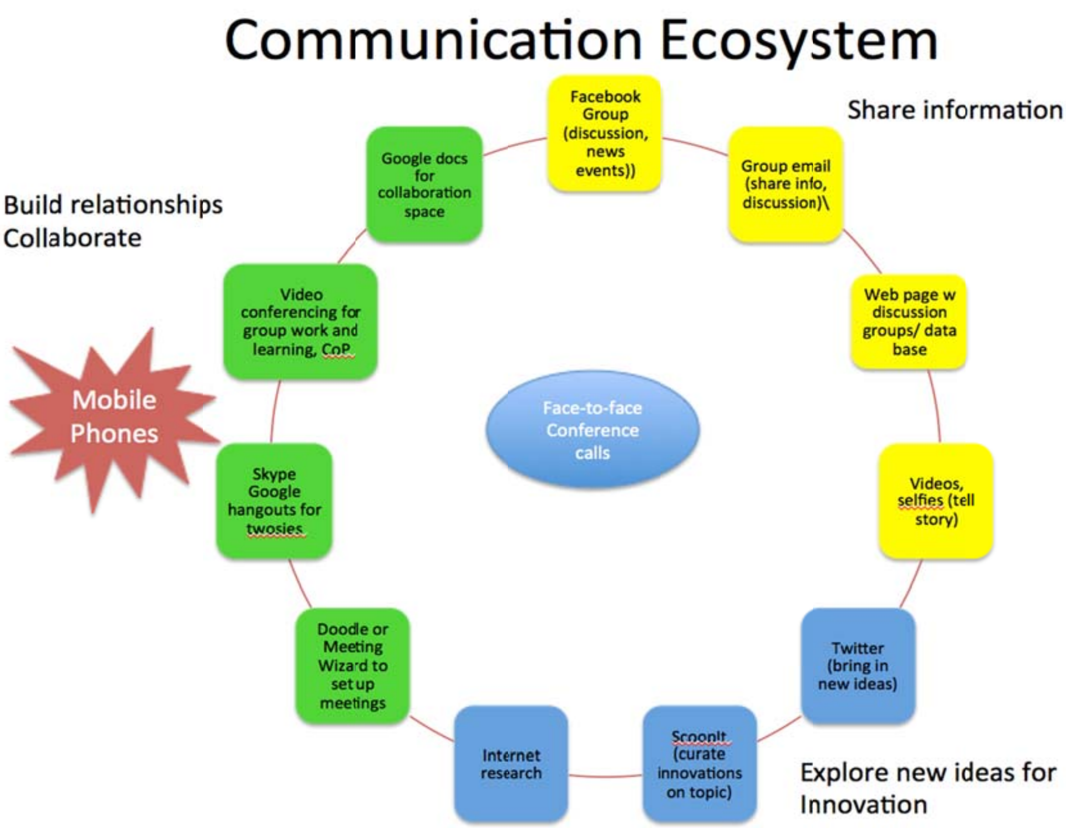
Network Communications

Communication Ecosystem

For networks to generate effective self-organized action, they need a well-developed communications ecosystem so that people throughout the network are able to:

- Bring new ideas into the network
- Share information and their stories
- Discuss ideas and proposals
- Build relationships
- Identify clusters of people with common interests
- Work together
- Get feedback on progress

For this to happen, the network needs to integrate and connect a set of media and platforms. A key role of the Technical Assistance Team and the core team in each county is to learn about a wide range of platforms, experiment with using them, and then put together a communications ecosystem.



Elements in a Communications Ecosystem

Face-to-face meetings are generally where most of the work gets done. However, every network will probably want to set up a **group email** to share information and gather feedback. Co-coordinators should learn the use of platforms to simplify **meeting setup**, such as doodle.com or meetingwizard.com.

The next step for most of the counties (and TA Team) is to use **virtual platforms for collaborative work**. This includes using Google Docs as a repository for documents that the groups are working on together: agendas, proposals, task lists, participant lists, and surveys. This way, participants are able to more easily find pertinent documents and contribute to their development (if they keep google drive in their favorites bar).

Another critical platform is the use of **videoconferencing,** especially for the TA Team and the tri-county Community of Practice. Since we receive 80% of our information from visual cues, videoconferencing helps build relationships and trust more quickly than conference calls. TA staff have joined meetings through videoconferencing. This could be a strategy for people to enable people from rural parts of the counties to attend meetings.

RHI counties need to think explicitly about how they **access new ideas** from outside their community. Inter-county sharing is already underway, and speakers at meetings also provide or help generate new ideas. Internet research can also be used to identify communities who have successfully implemented innovative access projects and learn from their experiences.

Setting up platforms needs to be followed by training in their use to minimize technical difficulties and ensure counties can get the most from these new tools.

Examples from Other Communities

Some networks are setting up Facebook groups because it is easier for anyone in the network to post a comment or question, thus encouraging more engagement. Here is an example of a successful Facebook Group Network. https://www.facebook.com/groups/339757846085496/

Another network set up a weekly "sandbox" where anyone in the network could come to an hour-long video conference call and learn about new communications platforms. The group set up a Google Doc where people could list what they wanted to learn. Then, during the call, the group explored the use of that tool or platform with people taking turns taking notes so that others who did not make the call could learn as well. In this way, the network was able to grow its skills and usage of new platforms in a very short time. A group in Michigan held a similar brown bag session twice a month in a local computer lab.

Steps to a More Engaging Communications Ecosystem

At Meetings

Help people get to know each other and more deeply. Ideas include:

1. Break into small groups.
2. Build in time for two-sies for relationship building (Speed Networking page 103, Holley) and/or assign two-sies outside of the meeting and ask people to report out during the meeting.
3. Use Skype so more people can attend.
4. Encourage different people to facilitate different parts of the meeting.
5. Make all tasks two-sies.

Group Email

1. Have someone or a small group of people committed to asking and answering questions to people on the email list to increase their participation.
2. At least weekly, ask people to share about successes or challenges.
3. Make sure participants understand that "Reply All" can be used to share information with everyone.
4. Encourage people to have two-sies.

Conferences

1. Try open space or Clustering (Chapt 9, Holley).
2. Participative conference planning: Have Adobe Connect calls open to all network participants.

Platforms

1. Train network participants about Twitter and Scoop.it.
2. Set up Facebook group and have small groups do proactive facilitation (ask questions frequently to draw out people).
3. Have comments on web page.

Self-organized Groups

1. Coach coordinators to set up and learn to use Google Docs and videoconferencing (anymeeting.com, readytalk.com, google hangouts).
2. Show how to set up group email for project.

Additional Resources

Beth Kanter and Allison Fine, *The Networked Non-profit: Connecting with Social Media to Drive Change*
http://amzn.to/1IirNi4

Holley, June (2012). *Network Weaver Handbook: A guide to transformational networks*. Athens, OH: Network Weaver Publishing.

Learn more about REACH Healthcare Foundation

Visit us at **www.reachhealth.org** or contact:

William Moore, Ph.D., Vice President of Programs and Evaluation, REACH Healthcare Foundation

Phone: (913) 432-4196 **Email:** bill@reachhealth.org **Twitter:** @wmoore_KChealth

For more information about Communications, contact:

Kristin Johnstad – **Phone:** (612) 386-6296 **Email:** Kristin@kristinjohnstad.com

June Holley – **Phone:** (740) 591-4705 **Email:** june@networkweaving.com